

Organizational Learning in Schools: The Antecedent and Moderating Factors

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Abstract: This review paper explores 20 peer-reviewed articles on the concept of organizational learning in schools between 2015 and 2023. Using qualitative systematic analysis method to synthesize and analyze current research literature, the study identified various ways in which scholars have described organizational learning, the conditions that precede and moderate organizational learning in schools. The findings established that school culture, school climate, leadership styles, shared leadership, and teacher leadership are antecedent factors that enact organizational learning while teacher collaboration, principal's innovative behavior, professional learning community, and departmental leadership are found to moderate the effects of organizational learning. The study provides implications for research and practice on creating and maintaining a school culture that encourages effective organizational learning that productively responds to the continuous and dynamic initiatives in school environment in today's complex world.

Keywords: Organizational learning, school culture, school climate, shared leadership, teacher leadership, professional learning community

With the rapid acceleration and complexity of knowledge globally, school organizations need to develop teachers that can embrace new knowledge, practices, innovations, and different ways of thinking for their survival and continuation (Collinson & Cook, 2007). School is an open social system of teaching and learning where policies change to allow new mandates, curricula are constantly renewed, and administrators keep changing with each bringing new ideas and operating systems (Collinson & Cook, 2007; Hoy & Miskel, 2013), hence the necessity to encourage individual and collective learning among teachers for school effectiveness. Leithwood and Louis (2006) argued that the school organization is a complex social entity which will function well with a self-organizing capacity that significantly enhance the individual and collective learning of school professionals. Moreover, studies found out that identifying and accomplishing teachers personalized and organizational learning needs require the design of a school structure that engages collaborative leadership practices (Andrews et al., 2020).

Evidently, organizational learning offers a promising path for school system to continuously improve its capabilities for innovations, as well as influence and strengthen teachers' behavior and capacity to effectively respond to the complex and dynamic environment (Da'as et al., 2020; Supriadi et al., 2020a). However, creating an effective organizational learning process that productively responds to the continuous and dynamic initiatives in the school environment requires systematic efforts (Collinson & Cook, 2007). More so that organizational learning has been reported to be an important element of learning organization that ensures teacher quality and school excellence (Rashid & Mansor, 2018). Thus, ensuring that schools have effective organizational learning system that supports teachers' professional engagement is essential for school improvement. Therefore, this study explored current research evidence on the concept of organizational learning in schools to identify the patterns in which scholars have described the construct, the factors that precede it, as well as the factors that strengthen its relationships among school variables. The following research questions were addressed:

- (1) What is organizational learning in schools?
- (2) What are the antecedents and moderating factors that support organizational learning in schools?

Methodology

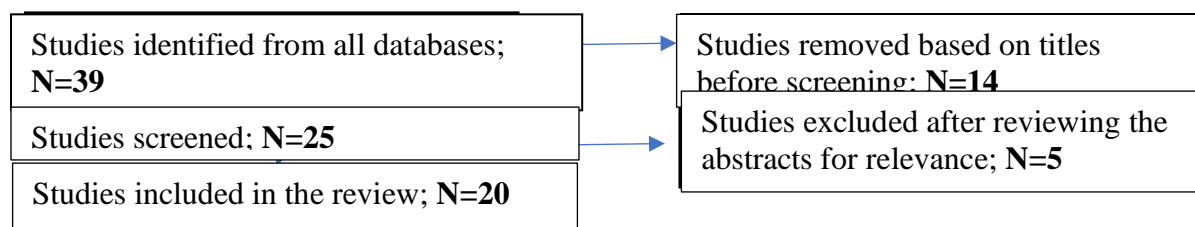
The study employed a qualitative systematic review technique to identify and synthesize relevant evidence to answer the research questions. Systematic review is a research approach that aims at collecting, appraising, and synthesizing existing evidence on a particular topic or to explore a specific research inquiry which informs decision-making, policy, and practice (Møller & Myles, 2016). Conducting systematic review involves six specific steps, which are planning and framing of the study and research questions; identifying the search terms, databases, and retrieving studies or findings; evaluating the studies by screening, sorting, and appraising; collecting, coding, and synthesizing the selected studies; explaining and analyzing the findings by putting them into context; and summarizing the research report (Møller & Myles, 2016; Munn et al., 2018). For this study, the steps are described and explained using the headings: study design, data sourcing and evaluating, data analysis, findings, and conclusions.

Study Design

The study was designed using the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) by first framing the research questions, determining the inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as developing the protocols. The criteria for inclusion are peer-reviewed articles between 2015 and 2023 to ensure that the review is based on current studies that reflects the 21st century organizational learning process in schools; studies written in English language; and studies with organizational learning, teacher professional learning, and professional learning communities as key words in their titles and abstracts.

Data Sourcing and Evaluating

Using the established search terms, “organizational learning in schools”, “organizational learning” AND “leadership”, “professional learning communities”, searches were made through the ERIC database, Emerald insight, UM library catalogue, and Google scholar to identify 20 peer-reviewed articles, published between 2015 and 2023. Result is presented in the chart below:



Relevant articles were determined by reading the titles and abstracts of the papers in the first phase and the full text in the second phase. The twenty selected articles are from the well-reputed journals that focus on professional development, educational management, school effectiveness, and school leadership. Such journals are: *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *Journal of English Teaching*, *Professional Development in Education*, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership*, *Journal of Professional Capital, and Community*, *Teacher Development*, *School Leadership and Management*, *International Journal of Teacher Leadership*, *Peabody Journal of Education*, *International of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *Journal for Educational Administration*, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed, using a synthesis matrix on Microsoft excel to establish themes and patterns in the studies. Patterns in the form of themes/subheadings were determined and findings from the literature were listed under each theme. The findings were then collated put into context to answer the research questions and form decisions. The reliability and validity of studies were checked to confirm the strength and eligibility of evidence included. None of the study in this review has a Cronbach’s alpha of less than 0.7.

Findings

Meaning of Organizational Learning

Scholars have critically conceptualized organizational learning in schools as an essential aspect of school change. The significance of organizational learning is evident in the literature due to its importance to school effectiveness and in maintaining success in today’s ever-changing world (Rashid & Mansor, 2018). Studies generally documented organizational learning as a process, strategy, mechanism, and structure between the organization, individuals, and groups, enacted by the organization that allows continuous improvement in its capabilities for innovations (Fadillah et al., 2020; Rashid & Mansor, 2018; Supriadi et al., 2020); such that influences and strengthens teachers’ behavior and capacity at the organizational level to effectively respond to the complex and dynamic environment (Da’as et al., 2020). By encouraging organizational learning within the school, teachers can learn new and more effective ways of

creating useful ideas and innovations that will enhance their functioning, growth, and well-being (Hosseini et al., 2020; Schechter et al., 2022; Supriadi et al., 2020) which will subsequently improve the school. Thus, organizational learning provides a path towards gaining a competitive advantage and any organization with the objective of growing prosperity should not take it for granted (Sadegh Sharifirad, 2011).

Meanwhile, improving school innovative capacities that respond to the global community require an efficient knowledge creation. Thus, Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2020) reported that organizational learning is a structured process that requires personal development, fellowship, principles, and nurturing environments to create and express knowledge for sustainable changes to occur in a school organization. This process involves: acquiring new knowledge, skills, and tools collectively (Wieczorek & Lear, 2018); dynamically creating knowledge through employee's daily experiences (Hosseini et al., 2020); accelerating knowledge and serving as mechanism for innovation (Supriadi et al., 2020); and school principal's practice in routinely creating a learning environment where teachers strive for student success (Schechter et al., 2022). One of the management tactics that can lend credence to school leaders is the enabling of a form of learning that can meet teacher needs both individually and collectively (Andrews et al., 2020b; Ryu et al., 2022).

In other words, organizational learning enhances the development of collaborative learning competency and shared values that will allow the school to achieve its objectives and results (Gairín Sallán et al., 2022; Schechter et al., 2022). As knowledge cannot be created in isolation, opportunities will be provided for teachers to daily discuss and process information about their practice in order to improve it (Da'as et al., 2020) and achieve an effective school and teacher quality (Andrews et al., 2020). Similar to this, Louis and Murphy, (2017); Rashid and Mansor, (2018) concluded that to maintain excellence, schools will give precedence and priority to continuous learning individually and collectively for efficient and effective functioning and changes within and outside the school.

To sum up, organizational learning has generally been defined as a process, strategy and mechanism for school improvement and effective changes. To corroborate this, Lauer and Wilkesmann (2017) citing Argyris and Schon (1978) referred to organizational learning as a double-loop learning process that allows strategic changes in policies and values of a school organization through knowledge transfer and innovative thinking. Such as experimentation, collaboration with external parties, taking risks, and critically reflecting on evidences in practice (Susila Davis-Singaravelu, 2022) and the use of multidimensional learning that recognizes individual's learning accomplishments through a dynamically structured context (Andrews et al., 2020). Therefore, organizational learning is acknowledged through the lens of 'double-loop learning' that focuses on changing the organizational norms by resolving any form of identified incompatibility within the school system to allow effective teacher performance (Collinson & Cook, 2007).

Antecedents of Organizational Learning

The study identified school culture, school climate, leadership styles, shared leadership, and teacher leadership as the conditions that enact and precede organizational learning.

School Culture and Leadership Styles as an Antecedent. Schechter et al. (2022); Seashore Louis and Lee (2016) argued that bringing people together cannot only result to organizational learning, but the cultural norms of the organization such as academic support for students, trust and respect, professional community, collaborative interaction, and the school level are essential factors in making group learning occur. These authors claimed that the school cultural norms can significantly affect the organization's ability to manage or utilize learning. More often than not, organizational learning in schools is influenced by the culture and structure of the school that support learning. Schechter et al. (2022) documented that in terms of school culture, the teachers' beliefs about the values and norms of the school will produce excellent learning outcomes and the setting of the organizational routines and procedures to promote learning is essential for organizational learning.

Leaders undoubtedly play significant roles in the formation of organizational culture (Thien & Lee, 2023), they act as providers and nurturers of culture by creating the values, beliefs, and the assumptions that are necessary and relevant for the organizational learning (Hosseini et al., 2020; Nehez & Blossing, 2022). Scholars have given various definitions of organizational culture, however, general themes common to the definitions across board as stated by (Hoy & Miskel, 2013), is that "organizational culture is a system of shared orientations that hold the unit together and

give it a distinctive identity (pg. 180). The term “shared orientation” indicates a holistic entity where people’s perception, thought, and feelings combine to become basic norms and values that influence their behaviors and shape them as members of the organization. In school organizational culture for example, when novice teachers perceive the principal to be providing professional support and guidance, facilitating interpersonal communication that enables sharing and feedback between novice teachers and higher colleagues, and allowing a certain degree of autonomy for their instructional practice (Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Thien & Lee, 2023); then the school organization can be said to have a supportive culture, collaborative culture, and trust and respect. These school cultural norms and values will in turn influence the behavior of teachers within the school. Thus, school leaders play vital role in building and maintaining positive environment that stabilizes teachers growth and development (Thien & Lee, 2023).

Apparently, organizational learning cannot be enacted in isolation of school culture enabled by the school leadership practices, as the culture of the school determines the kind of learning that will take place within the school. For example, a growing body of research has shown that learning-centered leadership or instructional leadership actively engages the environment both internally and externally for opportunities to improve individual and collective learning of teachers, ensure an interactive social environment that allows collaboration, provide adequate resources to support teachers, and build an organizational culture that enhances learning within the school system (Haiyan et al., 2017; Louis & Murphy, 2017; Schechter et al., 2022). On the other hand, Ryu et al. (2022) reported that caring leadership provides a more patterned structure and practices of organizational learning at schools. In their study, they established that schools where leaders show adequate personal and professional care to teachers have greater collaborative drive for growth, expertise, achievement of teachers’ emotional needs. Thus, by doing these, school leaders will ensure and support adequate professional growth for teachers and improve their effectiveness. That is, organizational learning can be studied through school cultural and structural framework.

This argument was supported by (Fadillah et al., 2020; Hosseini et al., 2020), they established that organizational culture and leadership style significantly influence organizational learning. When school culture with shared values, beliefs, and experiences that influence teacher’s personal experiences, thoughts, and behavior is managed by effective leadership practice, organizational learning that can lead to improvement in the quantity and quality of school performance can then be enacted. In essence, incorporating holistic learning programs that entail elements of emotional intelligence coupled with the enhancement of social and professional support from school leaders is necessary in facilitating teacher professional learning. Thus, organizational learning offers a promising path through which school leaders can trail to improve teacher innovative capacities and professional growth (Supriadi et al., 2020).

School Climate and Leadership Style as Antecedents. Andrews et al. (2020); Da’as et al. (2020); Louis and Murphy (2017); Susila Davis-Singaravelu (2022) reported that , even though school culture and context are important elements in school’s organisational learning, school climate such as the emotional relationship between the principal and teachers, the perception of teachers on principal’s trust about their professional capacities, school leaders structured support, teachers’ critical reflection, professional autonomy, and collaborative learning community are found as more crucial elements in organizational learning and improvement. Similarly, Ryu et al. (2022) established that the caring leadership, division of labour, and collaboration enhance learning organization, stressing that the emotional and professional support received from leaders shape the pattern of practices of organizational learning in schools.

In other words, school leadership practices that allow teachers to be part of the decision-making process by providing a supportive and collaborative climate can enhance teachers’ individual and collective learning. In building a positive climate and culture within the organization, leaders are expected to take cognizance of values and beliefs that are acceptable, shared, and generally pursued by employees (Hosseini et al., 2020; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Thien & Lee, 2023). For example, in school context, teachers value a healthy climate of respect, trust, being part of decision-making, and recognition of their works by leaders (Cann et al., 2021; Hosseini et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2022) and as such school leaders should encourage such climate for teachers to function well and fulfil their professional needs (Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Ryu et al., 2022).

Shared Leadership and Teacher Leadership as Antecedents. Shared leadership and teacher leadership practices were also established in the literature as antecedents of organizational learning. According to Wang (2016) shared leadership with responsibility, emotional bond, open dialogue, and collaboration strengthens teacher professional learning and professionalism through mentoring, class observations, feedback, and lesson preparation

group. In support of this, Andrews et al. (2020); Lin et al. (2018), argued that in facilitating organizational learning, dynamic structural integration (DSI) must be utilized in engaging teacher leaders with individual teachers and focusing on their personal learning needs, goals, and achievements and also encourage peer learning that allows teachers working, thinking, raising ideas, and experimenting together (Avidov-Ungar & Konkes Ben Zion, 2019). Thus, teacher leaders' significance is emphasized in mentoring and aligning with teachers' individual learning goals as being experts and the closest to teachers.

According to Rashid and Mansor (2018), teachers play essential role in the process of transformation to make the school a learning organization. Teacher leadership creates professional learning community that allows teachers to engage in leadership activities, be part of decision making, share goals, collaborate, and jointly accept any responsibility to achieve success (Kowalski 2010; as cited in Rashid & Mansor, 2018). Teachers develop leadership skills through independent and self-directed learning, initiating school projects, and mentoring other teachers (Avidov-Ungar & Konkes Ben Zion, 2019). Teacher leadership is at the core of influencing organizational learning through developing trust, instructional process, professional network, and collaborative learning that can improve professional community and cause organizational change (Wieczorek & Lear, 2018).

Wang (2016) further revealed that teacher leadership in the forms of collaboration and expertise leadership enhances organizational learning; by enacting structures and processes that support shared responsibilities, collaborative learning and collective capacities were promoted. This submission was also supported by Andrews et al., (2020) when they documented that school leaders build support for organizational learning through dynamic structural integration that allows an organizational learning system of engagement with teacher's curiosity, ingenuity, transformative improvement, and commitment as well as collaboration with school leaders improving diversity of teacher learners. In this theory of action, school leaders learn from the teachers as teachers acquire knowledge within their classroom through inquiry and collaborative dialogue (Andrews et al., 2020). Thus, teacher leaders assume a substantial role in leadership for learning in schools by contributing to the change process and promote professional growth through teacher inquiry and collaborative learning contexts.

More importantly, collaboration and sharing of efforts and knowledge among teachers tend to increase outcome than individual's aggregate efforts; thus sharing of leadership responsibilities give rise to teacher leadership and consequently facilitates collaboration that increases school organizational learning (Lin et al., 2018). Teacher leaders influence organizational learning by building collegial and collaborative relationships which allows teachers to learn in collective and collaborative manner (Hairon et al., 2015).

Factors that Moderate between Organizational Learning and its Antecedents. Sequel to the antecedents of organizational learning discussed above, this study established some factors as moderators between organizational learning, school culture, school climate, leadership styles, shared leadership, and teacher leadership. Specifically, teacher collaboration, principal's innovative behavior, professional learning communities, and departmental leadership are identified as factors that moderates and strengthens the relationships between organizational learning and its antecedents. A model (Figure 1) was developed to explain this relationship:

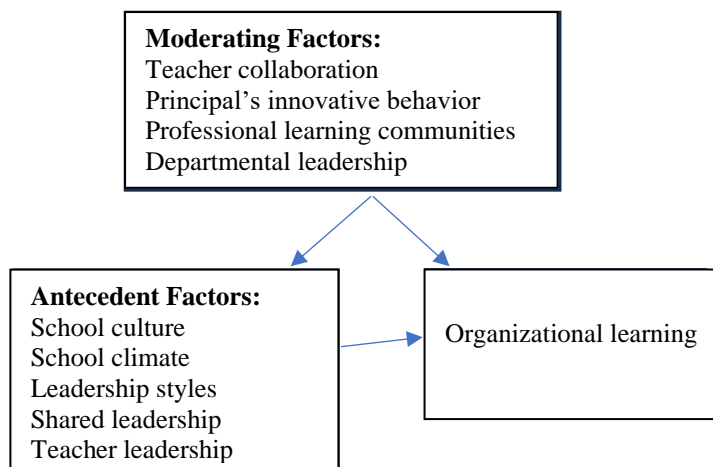


Figure 1: A self-developed model showing the relationship between antecedent factors, moderating factors and organizational learning.

Lin et al. (2018) identified teacher collaboration as an important moderator between school culture, leadership styles, teacher leadership and organizational learning. They stated that teacher leadership practice is viewed as learning together and building knowledge collectively and collaboratively within the school, thereby giving rise to organizational learning. That is, when teachers engage in conversations about their profession, share ideas, mentor one another, and work together as a team, they tend to learn, develop, and function better leading to good teaching quality. Also, Da'as et al. (2020) argued that school principals through innovative behavior empowers teachers and creates an effective culture and climate for learning organization in school. Thus, when principals are perceived to possess the ability to think and innovatively build an effective and collective learning environment, teachers tend to be more engaged in learning activities.

Furthermore, Yastibaş and Baturay (2021) found out that department leadership moderates the relationships between organizational learning and teacher leadership. They argued that school and departments administration play crucial roles in organizational learning by building a valued working environment that promotes teacher autonomy and leadership. With supervision by the administration, it was found that teachers can participate in decision-making process relating to instruction, thus support peer mentoring and learning. Notably also, the dimensions of professional learning community (reflective dialogues, shared responsibility, and deprivatized practices) were found to provide mutual interconnection between organizational learning and teacher leadership (Seashore Louis & Lee, 2016). This is because these dimensions which basically explain how teachers relate to one another through collective interactions to achieve professional learning is an important part of the school organization that allows knowledge creation, peer mentoring, collegiality, and collaborative learning among teachers.

Conclusion

The future and survival of educational institutions in today's ever-changing world is dependent on continuous learning and growth. Thus, this study provides a thought-provoking insight on the significance of organizational learning to the educational world. The study examined the development of organizational learning in schools and the factors that precede and strengthens organizational learning from 20 peer-reviewed journal articles. Various meanings of organizational learning were found in the literature, and this was organized sequentially as the improvement in innovative capacities of schools, knowledge creation, individual and collective learning system, and strategic changes in policies and values of school for sustainable improvement. Importantly, the study identified the conditions that precedes organizational learning in school such as school culture, leadership styles as well as factors that moderate between the antecedent factors and organizational learning, further research is suggested to have more clarity on these factors. The study concluded that even though antecedent factors are necessary to enact organizational learning in schools, the relationship between them and organizational learning is still dependent on the moderating factors.

Implications of the Study

The study contributed to the research and practice of educational leadership and administration by identifying the patterns at which scholars have described organizational learning and provided a synthesis of factors that are crucial to the development of effective organizational learning in school. Especially, this study identified the need for creating and maintaining a school culture and shared leadership practice that encourages effective organizational learning that productively responds to the continuous and dynamic initiatives in school environment in today's complex world.

Limitations and Future Studies

The need for deeper exploration on the concept of organizational learning in educational context and its relationship with teacher leadership is identified, as limited literature was found on the topic. Most of the studies used in this review utilized small sample size and conducted in similar context making the generalization of the findings difficult. Furthermore, future research is recommended to explore the relationships among the antecedent and moderating factors and organizational learning using larger samples and mixed-method research in other contexts like African school context as most evidence in this study is in Asian and American context and used either qualitative or quantitative.

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